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THE EIGHTEENTH EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ACADEMIES AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN RELATIONS WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

NOTE.—The following papers were read at the Eighteenth Educational Conference, held Friday and Saturday, November 11 and 12, 1904, at the University of Chicago. The limit of space at our command necessitated a considerable condensation of these articles.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE INFLUENCE OF FRATERNITIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

SPENCER R. SMITH

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The committee appointed by President William R. Harper, of the University of Chicago, to report upon the influence of fraternities and sororities in secondary schools to the Conference of Academies and High Schools in Relations with the University of Chicago, has made such investigation, and herewith submits its report.

The committee has not arrogated to itself any right to speak arbitrarily or *ex cathedra* on this subject, and its report is not an expression of the personal opinion of the members (although four of the committee, being high-school principals, have contributed their opinion along with many others). The committee has aimed to collate the actual experience of the leading academies and high schools, to find out just what place these societies have in our secondary

schools, to note the advantages or disadvantages of such organizations as to scholarship and discipline, and to discover what should be the attitude of school authorities toward such organizations in the future.

It seemed to the committee only fair that those who belong to such organizations should be given a chance to state their "reason for being" from the pupil's point of view, and as it was wished that the statement should be just, it was decided to write to the fraternity boys and sorority girls to get their point of view.

The investigation has been conducted along three main lines: (1) the experience of the principals of the leading high schools and academies has been collected; (2) the fraternity view of the matter has been secured in so far as possible; (3) the advice of the presidents of our leading colleges and universities has been asked.

To secure the necessary data, letters were sent to fifty-one fraternity members, fifty-four educators, and five people having special information on the subject, besides the letters sent to high-school and academy principals.

The questionnaire¹ was sent to 464 secondary schools, 201 of

¹ (1) Are there fraternities or sororities in your school? How many of each? (2) Are these fraternities or sororities local, or are they connected with national organizations? If not purely local, kindly give their names. (3) Are these fraternities or sororities under supervision of the faculty or recognized in any way by the school authorities? If under faculty supervision, what regulations are enforced? Do the fraternities or sororities admit faculty members? (4) Have these fraternities or sororities, to your knowledge, any standards (birth, wealth, worth, etc.), governing the admission of members and the character of their social life? (5) Do these fraternities or sororities occupy rooms in the school building? Do they maintain chapter-houses or rooms outside of the school? Or are the meetings held at the homes of the members from time to time, without fraternity or sorority rooms? (6) Do you have any information as to conduct in these rooms or houses? Is smoking, card-playing, or late hours indulged in? (7) Are the members of fraternities or sororities of low, average, or high scholarship? Where the scholarship is low or average, is it your opinion that it is caused by the fraternity or sorority life? Or are there other reasons for scholarship status? Can you cite any cases in your school where scholarship has been raised by the emulation of fraternity or sorority life? (8) Do these fraternities or sororities influence the social life of the school? Do they cause greater discrimination than ordinary friendships? Do they affect class organization or the organization of school dramatic, athletic, literary, and musical clubs? (9) Do you feel their influence in the discipline of the school? (10) Are the members of these fraternities or sororities pupils who are leaders in the social life of the school or the district in which the school is situated? (11) Is there apparent any feeling of distrust or jealousy on the part of those not invited to join these fraternities or sororities?

which did not answer. To these, second letters were sent. After replies had been received to the second request, it was found that there were 288 answers from principals outside of Chicago, and 18 replies from principals in Chicago, making a total of 306 replies. Of the schools reporting, 120 had fraternities, and it was from these that the principal data were gathered.

The question in regard to school and fraternity-sorority membership was fully answered by only 19 private schools and 71 public schools, and it is from their report that the following per cent. estimate has been made. In 19 private schools, having a total enrolment of 2,207 and a fraternity-sorority membership of 796, the ratio of those in the societies to the total enrolment was found to be 36.06. In 71 public schools having a total enrolment of 54,827 and a fraternity-sorority membership of 4,523, the ratio was found to be 8.25.

Of the high schools written to, about 170 had no fraternities or sororities in their schools, and, consequently, were not in a position to state present conditions. However, some of the principals had had a former experience on which to base very decided opinions. Some favored such organizations; the majority strongly opposed them. Almost without exception, the grounds of opposition of these men were the same as those of principals now having to deal with this problem. To avoid repetition, we will not give these reasons now, but will pass on to the opinions of those who have actual and present experience.

nities or sororities? (12) What is the attitude of the alumni members of the fraternities or sororities toward the active membership of the fraternity or sorority? (13) What is the attitude of parents toward the fraternities or sororities in your school? (14) Can you give the committee an idea of the expenses of the fraternities or sororities to the pupil for maintenance, banquets, dinners, dances, conventions, etc.? (15) What is the membership of your school? (Boys)——. (Girls)——. What is the aggregate membership of the fraternities or sororities? (Boys)——. Girls——. (16) What course would you advise: (a) The abolition of fraternities or sororities as organizations in secondary schools? (b) Their continuance under faculty supervision? (c) Or their continuance as outside organizations not under school jurisdiction? Are your objections the same for the sororities as for the fraternities? (17) If there is neither fraternity nor sorority in your school, are there club organizations of a social character without the secrecy of the fraternity? How are they managed? Are they under the supervision of the faculty? What are their tendencies? (18) Would you consider it advisable or desirable to establish in secondary schools an honor society similar to the Phi Beta Kappa? (Remarks.—Kindly add any information you may have, favorable or in objection, that may not be covered by the above questions.)

In making a statement of this phase of the life of the secondary school, it will be necessary to distinguish sharply between the private school and the public school. The fact that in the private school the children are often boarding away from home, and that they are fewer in number and more nearly of the same social condition than are the children in public schools, makes the conditions entirely different. The principals of the *smaller* private schools have made the point that their schools so closely resemble the home that any such organization is altogether unnecessary. There is no room for little families inside the larger family. The *larger* private schools have, and approve, the secret society. About one-half of the total enrolment are members of the secret societies, and no jealousy worth mentioning is shown by the other half. They are helpful in the social life of the school, and very often are an aid in the discipline.

The feeling of the private *military* schools is somewhat different. The military spirit in them produces a sort of democracy and contempt for social "functions" which makes the introduction of the "frat" almost impossible. They have made other arrangements for natural schoolboy rivalry.

In regard to establishing a society similar to the Phi Beta Kappa, opinion is divided. This idea is much more popular in private than in public schools, and yet there is fear expressed that too much emphasis be put upon marks and grades. A great many, however, have deferred expressing an opinion upon this subject, so that the data are altogether incomplete.

The public schools consulted have expressed almost every shade of opinion possible upon every question asked, so that there has been considerable difficulty in separating the chaff from the wheat, and any misquotation here is due to a misunderstanding of a fragmentary answer. Fraternities range from one to six in number. In many schools there is but one sorority. In the Girls' High School of San Francisco seven sororities were found. In schools where both fraternity and sorority thrive there is also great difference in the number. Many schools have but one of each. In the Central High School of Toledo, Ohio, nine fraternities and five sororities exist. As one principal has remarked, sororities and fraternities can be as numerous as the Greek alphabet, cleverly manipulated, will permit.

National and local societies are almost equal in number. In most of the schools heard from, faculty members have no supervision. In a few they have indirect control. In many they avoid supervision until interference is necessary. It is a rather noticeable fact that sororities are more anxious to take in women teachers than fraternities are to take in men teachers. In some schools the faculty has avoided supervision deliberately in order to show its feeling that the home is responsible for this activity of the pupils.

Most of the societies maintain that worth is one of the qualifications for admission. In about half of the schools the principals state that there are no standards apparent. Wealth, social standing, personal popularity, athletic prowess, good fellowship, companionability, school prominence, are all qualifications. In one or two schools good character and manly bearing, congeniality and academic standing, are recommendations for admission. In one case, a girl was kept out because she was "purse-proud." Being a Catholic or a Jew is also found in two instances to be a bar. One unusual case of "fraternity arrogance" is found in a school in Illinois where the principal states that "good scholarship was frequently a bar" to membership.

Wherever a fraternity has been able to afford it, a chapter-house or rooms have been rented. Principals approving of fraternities have given them a room or rooms in their schools for business meetings, but the social meetings are held in chapter-rooms or in the homes of the members. The sororities differ from the fraternities in this, that the meetings are held without exception in the homes of the girls.

The character of these meetings is widely varied. One sorority is reported as doing sewing, needlework, and cooking at its meetings. The conduct of the girls is reported to be perfectly proper. The boys have not such a good record, though there are some who "take pride in keeping the meetings respectable." Some principals report smoking, drinking, card-playing, and late hours, as being habitually indulged in, though a minority of the principals has no such experience. Again, the conduct is quite innocent, nothing more dangerous than "peanuts, sandwiches, and lemonade" being indulged in. However, dangerous conditions anywhere point to the possibility of

conditions becoming dangerous everywhere, and the numerous excesses should be seriously noted.

The scholarship ranges from very poor to above the average, but is generally fair. There are one or two instances of sorority connections raising scholarship, and a few fraternity boys have been braced up by their fellows; but, in general, the tendency has been to lower the scholarship by wasting time. Scholarship is simply forgotten and neglected, while the social side of the pupil's life is overemphasized. One principal states an improvement in oral recitations, due perhaps to a gain in self-confidence.

The societies influence the social life of the school wherever they are numerous enough to do so, and usually for the worse. They form cliques and crowds which try to run the school, unless sternly repressed by the faculty. The large majority of the principals do not now feel the influence of these societies in the discipline of the school, but there are a few cases where they try to "run things." Some of the older schools in Massachusetts and New York have found these societies an aid, and their co-operation has been very helpful.

In three out of five cases the pupils belonging are social leaders in the school. Sometimes they are prominent because of being upper-class men. In some cases, although they are not leaders, "they think they are"—a rather pertinent observation. The schools which have had the most trouble report their societies to be "made up mostly of those inclined to be loud, rude, and disrespectful."

The question of envy of those not in the societies is next. There is almost universally slight, often acute, jealousy. In the Commercial High School of Brooklyn only 35 out of 1,050 are in the fraternity. The rest are not jealous, because they do not know that there is any such secret organization in the school. This seems to the committee a very fortunate state of affairs.

The attitude of the alumni members toward the active membership is generally friendly, often advisory or paternal, and again cordial and co-operative. Sometimes going to college and becoming interested in college societies causes lack of interest in the old school societies.

The parents are usually indifferent, but sometimes friendly. The more serious ones disapprove. Many who disapprove in their hearts lack the courage to say no. As a Wisconsin principal remarks:

"Parents in general have no sense where children are concerned. Perhaps the children have not permitted the parents to have an opinion." In one school the fraternity demands the consent of the parent as a prerequisite to admission.

The committee has not been able accurately to estimate the expense. It runs from \$3.50 to \$50 a year, exclusive of the cost of carriages, etc. In some cases it is paid by the week or by the month; sometimes by the year. One fraternity has an initiation fee of \$10.

The proportion of the members of the fraternities and sororities to the total school enrolment varies widely. The average fraternity membership is thirty, whether the school contains one hundred or fifteen hundred pupils. The only difference is that in the larger schools there are more fraternities. The exact figures are given earlier in this report.

The course advised by the principals reporting is generally unqualified abolition, though many who would like this think it impossible, and vote for their continuance under faculty supervision. But, again, there are those who state that faculty supervision is opposed to the fundamental idea of fraternity life, and that *any* virtue these organizations now have in making the members self-reliant would be lost if they were put under the care of the faculty.

Their continuance as outside organizations not under school jurisdiction appeals to many who consider this fraternity question a problem for the home, and not for the school. Others think that, if ignored and kept outside, they will die from lack of interest, and be "frozen out." The point made is that there is no logical reason for their existence, and that, therefore, they should be excluded, where not already established, and got rid of, where they flourish, as soon and as painlessly as possible. Sororities are said to cause more friction than fraternities.

The club instincts of the pupil of secondary-school age have found expression in literary, debating, and athletic societies. Camera clubs and societies for the study of science, of music, and of art, are also popular. Societies of this sort are open, and lack secrecy, initiations, and class distinctions. Without exception, the results have been good, the tendencies of the best, the feeling of all friendly. These societies are open to none of the objections urged against secret societies.

The advisability of establishing in secondary schools an honor society similar to the Phi Beta Kappa is very generally discussed, but the noes have it three to one. Some think it may be good; some think that scholarship and honor both should be made a basis for admission; but the consensus of opinion is that it would be extremely difficult to keep the scholarship standard uniform. One principal says: "Let us do nothing that tends to create caste, even the caste of scholarship." It is thought generally that such a society is one of the things to be kept for college days, and to be avoided in secondary schools, as it tends to ape the college, and that the best interest of the school demands institutions peculiar to its own necessities and individual requirements.

Summing up the argument for and against the secondary-school secret society, it is found that there are some schools which thoroughly believe in and strongly favor the presence of the secret society in the school. Prominent among these are Lewis Institute, Chicago, and Colgate Academy, Hamilton, N. Y. But these two schools are closer in spirit to the college than is the average secondary school.

The arguments made in favor of fraternities are: (1) they can be made very useful to the individual student as well as to the school at large; (2) they aid school discipline; (3) they foster friendships; (4) they increase school spirit and loyalty.

The arguments against secondary-school fraternities and sororities were numerous and various, but those recognized by the committee are mainly these:

1. *Their influence is detrimental to the school.*—They have been found an evil and a curse. Their tendency is to break up all literary societies and divide the school into cliques, and bring into the school the worst kind of politics and morals.

2. *They are detrimental to the student himself.*—(a) Positively, in that they hurt his mind and character. The greatest injury has resulted to the members themselves. It causes a decline in school interest and in the preparation of school work. A spirit of indifference to consequences and an air of superiority seem to follow. Many never complete the course. In their fraternity rooms rumor has it that there is little evil that boys can indulge in that is not carried on. (b) Negatively, they are of injury to the student in that they keep

him from doing things that he might otherwise do if he were a loyal member of a united, single-spirited school. The elect owe all that they have of excellence in force, character, and manners to lift the level of the mass. The school as a social organization ought to be unified by the generous spirit of those able to give, not broken into suspicious cliques. They split the school on every project in which unity is desirable.

3. *They are unnecessary.*—They fill no real need, as the college fraternities do. The students are at home and are too young to choose any life outside of the home life, and supposed to fill some of its needs. They ape the college, with no other reason than to be “collegey.”

4. *They are undemocratic.*—They cause much jealousy and heart-burning, especially among the girls. They are a source of grievance to many who are not “called.”

5. *The standards they set up are different from,* if not opposed to, the standards ideally set up by the school authorities. “All are organized on a social basis; the faithful students that neither dance, smoke, or dress well are not wanted.” They “are filled with sons and daughters of the wealthy to whom life seems only an idle dream.”

6. *They are often an element of danger in the government* of the school, when they have grown old and strong, and are a source of much annoyance to the authorities.

7. The committee, finding the final argument against fraternities and sororities very well voiced by a gentlemen from Massachusetts, quotes him fully:

Any system that makes paramount the decisions of immature minds on questions of social and other school distinctions is, in my opinion, radically vicious. Any plan that tends to break up the solidarity of the school in the interest of imaginary class distinctions cannot be too sedulously avoided. Any scheme that weakens the influence of the master and his teachers, and exalts the power of pupils without regard to master or teachers, strikes at the very foundations of the American school.

The absolutely inane antics of initiation among these secret societies are enough to condemn them in the minds of intelligent people. To my certain knowledge, the usefulness of more than one headmaster has been destroyed in the community by friction arising from the prevalence of the secret-society evil.

Hence, when some years ago one of my pupils told me that he had been asked to form a chapter of a secret society in our school, and asked my opinion on the subject, I dissuaded him so strongly that he willingly abandoned the idea.

For a closing sentiment, let me suggest the following: No castes, no secret societies, no privileged classes in the schools; but the schools, and every feature of them, "of the people, for the people, and by the people."

As a part of the report relating to the influence of these organizations in secondary schools from the different view-points of the member of the fraternity or sorority, the parent, and some of the leading educators other than high-school or academy principals, is in the form of letters, it is not deemed practical to reproduce this part of the report here. This matter will be included in a later report of the committee.

At the close of this report, President Harper asked whether the committee had any recommendations to make. The chairman stated that the committee would like to present its report as a report of progress, and to be continued with a view to report further at the next session. It was accordingly moved that the committee be continued.

After further discussion of the question involved in the report, it was voted that, in view of the evidence submitted, in the opinion of those in attendance at this meeting, the presence of secret societies in schools of secondary grade is harmful to the best interests of these schools, and of the individuals concerned. It was then voted to defer the discussion of the third topic announced on the program, namely, co-operation of school with town for civic improvement, and that a committee be named by the chair to report upon that topic at the executive session of Deans and Principals for the Nineteenth Educational Conference.

OPEN SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS

PRINCIPAL PAUL G. W. KELLER
Manitowoc, Wis.

[ABBREVIATED]

The problem of school organizations is one that touches, in its first and last analysis, a fundamental principle in our civic life, of which the school itself, with its organizations, is an important part; at least the school is a great factor in the molding of those activities which later will be a part of the civic life.

It is not the purpose of this paper to point out the elements in secret organizations which are undemocratic, and so inconsistent with the ideal of an American school system, nor to discuss the legality of the control of such organizations by school authorities. I will